Punjabic Toponyms:

A Cursory Attempt at Documenting and Deciphering the Toponyms of Punjab through the Science of Toponymy, Toponymics, or Toponomastics

July 2025

Author: Anonymous Canadian Sikh

Aali/Ali/Ala = same concept as ‘Wal’ and ‘Pur’ (dialectal variations).

Abad = suffix used to refer to a population. From Farsi, 'populated' or 'settled'.

Akhara = martial training ground

Ana = meaning “town”. Examples include Ludhiana, Mastuana, and Nathana.

Anggan = see *Vihra* below.

Bad = short-form of ‘Abad’

Bar = areas far away from rivers usually consisting of shrubs and jungles where wild tribes roam. Punjab has many *baraan* like the Neeli Bar, Gondal Bar, etc.

Bassi/Basti = Persian words from the word “Basar-Gurdan” meaning 'habitat'. Traditionally, they comprised mostly of Persian/Muslim families. One of the earlier bassis was Basti Malik in the kingdom of Patiala, near Fategarh. Bassi Pathana, Bassi Kasso and Bassi Daultkhan are further examples of it.

Bein = rivulet

Bet = land where river-water comes to irrigate seasonally

Bir = reserved pasture-land or forest

Bunga = hospice or dwelling-place

Burj = tall tower which may be situated at the corner of a fortress

Cantt = cantonment area or zone

Chak/Chakk = settlement established in the Punjab Canal Colonies during the colonial-period, read-up on the Chak naming and numbering system for further details.

Chauni/Chowni = encampment, military-quarters or cantonment

Channi = a village fortified with tall *burjs* (guard or watch-towers) on four sides. Example: Channi Virkan

Chhapaṛ = local body or reservoir of water in villages, like ponds

Chow = rain water streams which flows down through the mountains and enters the Punjab Plains

Darbar = originally meant a royal court, was later used for religious sites

Darwaza = gateway or entry-point of a settlement

Dera = meaning “tent”, originally referred to an encampment

Devidwara = Shaktist temple

Dhuan = Udasi centre

Doab = tract of land lying between two confluent rivers. It is similar to an interfluve.

Garan/Graan = an alternative Punjabi term to refer to a village.

Garh/Garhi = fort or hold. Usually perched on a hill-top and was not essentially a residential area to begin with. The purpose of Garh was military and the fort offered a secure wall to the residents. Garhs with passage of time became residential areas when nomadic life attained stability. Fatehgarh, Hoalgarh, Lohgarh, Keshgarh and Anandgarh are some of the examples. Garhis were safe homes or shelter homes of residents of an area. Kachi Garhi in Chamkaur Sahib is an example.

Ganj = memorial to a saint. Another explanation is it means “market”.

Ghāt = situated on a riverbank

Haveli = traditional townhouse, mansion, or manor-house. Also referred to a place where animals/cattle were kept.

Hithar = place of lower-elevation

Jangal = jungle or forested area

Jathere = place of worship of an ancestral figure of a clan, tribe, or lineage

Jhidi = sacred-grove

Kalan = big village. In a location with two villages with the same name that may be historically connect via lineage, “Kalan” differentiates the larger village of the two.

Katra = fortified residential society

Ke = refers to someone’s place, examples are Lopoke, Harike.

Khanqah = Sufi monastery

Khurd = small village. In a location with two villages with the same name that may be historically connect via lineage, “Khurd” differentiates the smaller village of the two.

Khera = first settlement. After the death of the founder of villages, they used to make a monument commemorating the founder of the initial settlement and it is known as a *khera*.

Kot/Kotla = literally means “fort”. Kots were walled-residential areas and usually located on mounds, elevated patches of land, or in the foothills. Some of the examples are Sialkot, Raikot and Dharamkot. An example for ‘Kotla’ is Malerkotla.

Kotli = small, strategic fort

Majra/Majri/Mazara = tenant village. Majra means a town and Majri refers to a town in the same area but with less significance and a smaller area and population. Example: Manimajra in the Chandigarh area. Majra should be seen in the context of mujārās of a feudal lord, living in their vicinity. Majri is just a smaller-sized version of such a habitation. Majra and place of abode thus become synonymous.

Mandi = a marketplace. Also where crops are sold.

Maruthal = Desert

Maseet/Masit = mosque

Mian = respected person

Nagar = meaning “way”. One source claims it means “city”

Nahri = irrigation canal

Nikka/Nikki = same concept as “wadda” and “waddi” naming pattern.

Nulla/Nullah/Nālla = stream, or watercourse, a steep narrow valley.

Pandori = possibly related to the term pundit/pandit or a diminutive of ਪਿੰਡ (piṇḍ, “village”). Famous example: Pandori Dham

Parganna = sub-district

Pat = Probably 'rock' or 'plateau' from Sanskrit prastar. E.g., Panipat, Sonepat.

Patti/Pati = traditional sub-division of a settlement/village/town/city that were inhabited by a specific clan usually having a common ancestor who settled in that particular area. Pattis were also used to divide the village between the different branches of a single clan. Hence, there will be villages of Sidhu Jats where all the pattis belong to them, but is differentiated by their ancestors.

Pind = lump, a small altar of sand. Refers to a village.

Pur/Pura/Pore/Puri = by or of. Some examples being Hoshiarpur, Haripur, and Rampur. While one explanation describe pur as a village but interestingly another theory states is was a town or a village which had to be reached either by crossing a bridge or via a boat. Another explanation is that it is a suffix used to refer to a population. Another source simply describes it as meaning “town”. It may also mean “full of”.

Qila/Kila = fortress

Rakh = reserved forest

Sahib = honourifical suffix

Samadh/Smadh/Samadi/Samadhi = temple, shrine, or memorial commemorating the dead (similar to a tomb or mausoleum but the remains are usually cremated and may be kept in an urn)

Sar = meaning a pond or pool, derived from the word 'sarovar'. Examples include Amritsar and Muktsar.

Sarovar = temple-tank, sacred or holy body of water

Sath = location in a Punjabi village or settlement where locals gather and sit together.

Shahr = from a Persian word for city.

Sharif = eminent chief

Shivala = Shaivist temple

Sooa/Sooya = canal or a kind of very small *nala* that can create a small pond-like structure

Sri = honourifical prefix

Subah/Subah = term used for province-level administrative divisions by the Mughal and Sikh empires

Takht = royal throne of a Sikh guru

Taksal = traditional Sikh seminary or religious place-of-learning

Talwandi = comes from *Tal* = Land and *Wandi* = Divididation.

Tehsil/Tahsil = sub-district

Thana = police-station

Tikana = term used by some religious sects, such as the Sewapanthis, for their centres

Tilla = small hill or elevated piece of land

Thakurdwara = Vaishnavist temple

Toba/Tobha = a lake, pond, or small-body of water.

Uttar = place of higher-elevation

Vihra = a courtyard surrounded by buildings.

Waali/Wal/Wala = "Wal" is the short form of 'Wala'. Wala and Wali mean "habitats". Walas have names of prominent personalities as their prefixes. For example Attari-wala, Nihal Singh-wala and Hussaini-wala, the last being named after Muslim pir, Baba Hussainiwala. Walis have names of lesser known people as their prefix or suffix. Examples are- Hiran-Wali near Fazilka and Moranwali in Hoshiarpur district. Another explanation is that it is a suffix used to refer to a population.

Zila/Zilla = district

Examples

Pur

Khichipur = named by Khichi Rajput

Madhopur = named by Madho Dhaliwal

Mahilpur = named by Mahla Bains

Burj

Burj Baba Akali Phula Singh, Amritsar

Burj Baba Deep Singh, Damdama Sahib

Ganj

Shaheed Ganj Baba Gurbaksh Singh, Golden Temple complex, Amritsar

Shaheed Ganj Bhai Taru Singh, Lahore

Takht

Akal Takht, Amritsar

Takht Sri Hazur Sahib, Abchal Nagar, Nanded

Toba/Tobha

Toba Toba Tek Singh, Pakistan

Tobha Bhai Salo Ji, Amritsar

Kalan and **Khurd**

Waddi Dosanjha = Dosanjh Kalan

Shotia Dosanjha = Dosanjh Khurd

Kot

Kot Ise Khan = fort of Isa Khan Manj

Kot Kapura = fort of Kapura Brar

Kot Fatuhi = fort of Fattu Bains

Kot Duna = fort of Duna Sidhu

Kot Badal Khan = fort of Badal Pathan

Chak Numbering and Naming System

The *Chak* or *Chakk* numbering and naming system was introduced by the British colonists. They are associated with the Punjab Canal Colonies.

The home of the fourth Sikh Guru was called Guru Da Chak (later Chak Ramdas) after which the precendent to call villages with Chak as prefix or suffix was set. Examples are Chak Fatehsingh, Chak Ramdas, Chak Sheranwali. In specific districts in West Punjab, such as the former Lyallpur and Montgomery districts, Jatt Sikh settlers were brought in from eastern Punjabi districts like Jalandhar, Amritsar, and Ludhiana from the 1880's to 1930's by the British for newly established canal colonies, which were previously barren lands, and these areas mostly had sparse population consisting of pastoralist Muslim Jāngli tribes. These colonists were settled in the newly establishment villages called *Chaks*, which were numbered based upon the canals which irrigated them. Wells were installed in order to make uninhabited places habitable, but were not the direct reasoning for the Chak name. Some believe the Chak numbers came from number of government-installed tubewells and the numbers assigned to them, thus if one small village had one well only and hence the number of the well became the identity of the village too, however this is incorrect.

The villages are named using a four-part British colonial era nomenclature: "Chak (number) (letters) (village name)". Variations exist but usually names of chak have four parts:

1. "Chak" prefix

2. Number, a unique number for each village

3. Letter, one or two letter which correspond to the code given to the specific source of water, such as the Rajwaha (irrigation channel)

4. Village name, settlements usually started out as the small *dhanis* which later evolved into the villages. The name of settlement is usually based on the name of village's founding *chowdhury*, *gotra* (known as a *gott* in Punjabi), or *jathera* (ancestral founder of a clan or tribe).

Examples of four-part nomenclature are "Chak 106 JB Khichian" (JB denotes Jhang Branch canal), "Chak 445 GB Thaggan Wali" (GB denotes Gogera Branch canal), "Chak 354/WB Dunyapur", and Chak 236 GB Kilanwala (GB denotes Gugera Branch Canal).

Examples of chak names with first three components of the four-part nomenclature are Chak 152 P (P denotes the Panjnad River from which they draw water), Chak 128 NB (NB denotes North Branch canal) and Chak 21 MB.

Examples of chak names with first two components of the four-part nomenclature are Chak No. 22.

Examples of chak names which now retain only the name of village are Chak Bahmanian (named after the Brahmin caste), Chak Des Raj (named after the founder), Chak Mai Dass (named after the founder), Chak Bilgan, Chak Guru, etc.

References

1) Twitter. Web-link: https://x.com/Prabh2003166342/status/1882675949277438275

https://x.com/Prabh2003166342/status/1943692129588408704

2) Brief History on Chak Village Names, Reddit, Web-link: https://www.reddit.com/r/punjab/comments/16ai831/brief_history_on_chak_village_names/

3) Wikipedia. Web-link: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chak_(village)#Nomenclature

4) *Demystifying the village-naming hierarchy*, Dawn, anonymous Sahiwal-based correspondent, published February 13th, 2012, retrieved on July 6th, 2025. Web-link: https://www.dawn.com/news/695191/demystifying-the-village-naming-hierarchy

5) *Exploring Different Types of Asthan*, Virasati Asthan Seva. Web-link: https://www.instagram.com/p/DFGajUVMXyW/

6) *Punjabi Village Structure*, Instagram, Harmilan Singh (@tawarikh_e_punjab), published December 30th, 2022, retrieved July 6th, 2025. Web-link: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cmx9wTrvB7l/

7) *Majra, Majri, Wala, Wali ... Punjab's Cities, Towns & Villages*, sikhchic (originally published by the Hindustan Times), Khushwant Singh, Chandigarh, published August 30th, 2011, retrieved July 6th, 2025. Web-link: https://www.sikhchic.com/travel/majra_majri_wala_wali_punjabs_cities_towns_villages

8) *Guru Shabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*, Kahn Singh of Nabha, 1930.

9) *A lot of village names in Punjab start/end with* ਬੀਰ/ਬੀੜ, ਕੱਲਾਂ, ਖੁੱਰਦ, ਕੋਟ/ਕੋਟਲਾ. *Any nomenclature/significance?* Reddit. u/Av_neesh. Published on September 8th, 2024, retrieved on July 6th, 2025. Web-link: https://www.reddit.com/r/punjabi/comments/1fbr5na/a_lot_of_village_names_in_punjab_startend_with/

10) Indian Place Names: Compiled from IRFCA posts. Not dated, retrieved on July 6th, 2025. Web-link: https://www.irfca.org/docs/place-names.html

11) *Urban Place Names in Pakistan: A Reflection of Cultural Characteristics* (1981) by Akhtar Husain Siddiqi and Robert W. Bastian

12) Various Reddit posts asking for feedback: https://old.reddit.com/r/ThethPunjabi/comments/1ltkl2n/help_needed_i_need_assistance_from_the_punjabi/ , https://old.reddit.com/r/punjab/comments/1ltkkz8/help_needed_i_need_assistance_from_the_punjabi/ , https://old.reddit.com/r/punjabi/comments/1ltkkrt/help_needed_i_need_assistance_from_the_punjabi/

13) Private correspondences with Twitter user @Prabh2003166342 in July 2025